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STATE FOR NEA/ARP
STATE PASS USTR FOR JBUNTIN
COMMERCE FOR ITA/COBERG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2017

TAGS: ETRD ECON PREL ECPS MU

SUBJECT: OMAN'S COMMERCE MINISTER REAFFIRMS DRIVE TOWARD FTA

REF: MUSCAT 774

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo, reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) On August 30, the Ambassador met with Minister of Commerce and Industry Maqbool bin Ali Sultan to discuss outstanding issues related to the implementation of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Maqbool noted that promulgation of three draft laws remains pending. He stated that the Ministry of Legal Affairs was still reviewing the draft text of the government tendering law, and remarked that his Ministry had placed a hold on the revised copyright and industrial property laws pending resolution of data protection concerns. The Ambassador reminded the Minister that USTR would not be able to accept Oman's data protection language as drafted in its industrial property law, but would search for alternative avenues once the Ministry of Health provided a listing of those pharmaceutical products not available on the private market. Maqbool promised to discuss this request with the Minister of Health.

¶2. (C) Maqbool acknowledged that the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) had not yet finalized its licensing criteria, but noted that the agency remained keen on completing them as quickly as possible. Reminded by the Ambassador of the need for draft submarine cable regulations, the Minister pledged to follow-up with the TRA on this issue. On customs, the Minister confirmed receipt of a letter from the Royal Oman Police's Inspector General of Customs on how the latter would abide by the FTA's provisions, as identified by Ambassador Hillman during her May visit to Muscat. The customs authority, however, has not yet reached agreement with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on the draft rules of origin annex, according to the Minister. On the issue of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), the Minister reaffirmed that the Council of Ministers had already approved Oman's accession, though a royal decree implementing the decision has not yet been issued.

¶3. (C) Comment: The Ambassador used this occasion to press the Minister on the importance of completing outstanding FTA items in order to meet a proposed November 1 entry into force date. This may be too optimistic, given the complexity of the remaining action items -- telecommunications licensing in particular -- and the approaching season of Ramadan. Nevertheless, the Minister appeared intent on moving toward implementation of the FTA as quickly as possible, and will use the time before Ramadan to chide his colleagues on completing their respective tasks. End comment.

GRAPPO